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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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Wednesday, 12 April 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: The stakes in Syria today are very high; we all know why. In the light of recent developments, two paths lie before us: one is more outrages, more destruction and death, stoked by regional and international divisions or even escalation and deeper confrontation. That is what all Syrians fear, and I share their fears.

But there is another path — more serious discussion, a real de-escalation and ceasefire, and a rallying behind the only way out of the Syrian nightmare. We urgently need a consensus among major stakeholders to support concretely the United Nations-led negotiation process, and this is the occasion for doing it with the goal of attaining a package for an orderly, mapped-out, credible and irreversible agreed political transition as per resolution 2254 (2015).

Before the events of last week, we had made modest but incremental progress towards that goal. The fifth round of intra-Syrian talk in Geneva saw no breakthroughs — let us be frank — but no breakdown, either. The parties engaged — truly engaged — on substance for nine full days, which was no small feat. The discussions were mostly business-like and correct, and on the final day they all told me that they were ready to return to Geneva for a sixth round in May, at our invitation.

The Government and the opposition discussed in parallel, in the format of proximity talks, all four baskets: governance issues, constitutional process issues, election issues and counter-terrorism, security governance and confidence-building measures. These discussions were framed by the goal of a political transition, while preserving — obviously, we do not want mistakes like those we have made in the past — the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria within the context of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), the statements of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), and resolutions 2118 (2013), 2254 (2015), 2268 (2016) and 2336 (2016). Council members are all familiar with these, since they adopted them.

Yes, the delegations preferred to focus on different issues and yes, the gaps are still wide, but everyone in Geneva did engage on all baskets. They also discussed general principles regarding the character of a future, post-transition Syrian State. These United Nations ideas remain living points that can be further developed as the negotiations progress on the substance of each of the baskets. One day soon, we hope, all of these discussions must come together into a package for an overall negotiation — a real negotiation.

While it was premature to secure common understanding at this stage, some points became quite clear or more clear than before, at least to me, and perhaps to the Syrians, too. For example, I felt a growing appreciation that the basis of transition must be legally and constitutionally solid and the journey and destination well-mapped out and agreed upon. I had hoped that we could have proceeded in more detail on the constitutional dimension, which has potential for how to ensure the constitutional basis of the transition and how Syrians in transition mode might write and agree a new constitution. Nevertheless, there was a deepening of the process, and this should not be underestimated.

But now, let us be frank, this fragile progress is indeed in grave danger. Already in Geneva, the talks were overshadowed by an intensification of fighting on the ground and continued lack of safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access. I sent formal written appeals to the Astana ceasefire guarantors the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran. I urged all with influence and leverage to restore the credibility of the ceasefire and to do more to ensure that the United Nations can reach 4.7 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. We are ready to do so.

Displacement also has continued. Over the past month, more than 6,000 firefighters and their families

have been evacuated from Al-Waer to Idlib as part of local agreements. We have also learned of serious developments regarding the so-called four towns.

Political statements issued after the Geneva talks also sent some warning signals. The Government stated its intention to reconquer the entire territory of Syria rather than emphasize a ceasefire with real negotiations. Some opposition voices, on the other hand, also expressed support for military offensives, including battles led by internationally prohibited terrorist groups, or even cast doubt on the need to return to Geneva and give priority to military solutions. Then, as representatives from over 70 countries and international organizations gathered in Brussels in what was supposed to be and has been an important meeting regarding the future of Syrian to address Syrian humanitarian needs and commit to a post-transition reconstruction, which is terribly needed, we witnessed the horrors inflicted by chemical weapons on innocent Syrian victims, including children, women and men, in Khan Shaykun.

This outrage shocked the conscience of the whole human family. People all over the world also realized once again that the Syrian calamity is not just an affront to our shared values, but that it can affect the lives of citizens of any land, particularly if chemical weapons are used and war crimes, terrorism, mass displacement and unending war are accepted as something that we have to live with. The Syrians cannot live with it and neither can we, wherever we are.

A few days later, the United States targeted Al-Shayrat air base with a strike of 59 Tomahawk missiles. Under-Secretary-General Feltman briefed the Council on that extremely serious development on Friday (see S/PV.7919). Since then, we have seen more fighting and violence, with new claims of the use of cluster munitions in inhabited areas, barrel bombs and incendiary weapons, including in close proximity to Khan Shaykhun itself.

The Secretary-General has made clear his own position. He is appalled by the chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun and calls for accountability for such crimes. In the aftermath of the United States strike, he is mindful of the risk of escalation and appeals for restraint. He calls for for reinstating a nationwide ceasefire and for a refocus on the need for a political solution, which is also essential in the fight against terrorism.

This is a time for clear thinking, strategy, imagination and cooperation. on the ground. Those who do not want a negotiated a political settlement — we call them spoilers, as Council members know — are stopping at nothing to undermine the political process. They want us to fall into their trap. We must not allow that to happen. We must all resolve that the time has come for the intra-Syrian talks to move beyond preparatory discussions and into the real heart of the matter, across all four baskets, in order to secure a meaningful negotiated transition package.

The United Nations is ready to do its part. I have consulted with the Secretary-General, and I personally remain at my post and will continue to serve, especially in view of the current emergency. I am ready to reconvene talks in May, and the United Nations is ready to offer a real, substantive starting point for discussion and negotiations among the Syrians. But let us see a few things sorted out first, if we can.

As we speak, United States Secretary of State Tillerson is in Moscow to meet with the Russian Government. We welcome that direct, high-level diplomatic engagement at this crucial moment between the United States and Russia. I was in Moscow myself just before the last round and in Washington, D.C., yesterday. I participated on behalf of the United Nations in the trilateral encounter with the United States and Russia during the Geneva talks. Those two countries, the co-chairs of the ISSG, have serious differences — we know it — but also common interests and, indeed, responsibilities. They must find a way to work together in order to stabilize the situation in a deliberate, realistic and concerted way in support of the political process. Indeed, the Council, the region, and the ISSG members need to unite behind one process of mediation in Geneva.

We also need the ceasefire guarantors to step up and deliver now. Important countries have assumed the responsibility as guarantors. Those guarantees are being put to a severe test. Next week, the guarantors will meet in Tehran for a working-level meeting before a higher-level meeting in Astana planned for early May. We urge them to work towards renewing the ceasefire and on confidence-building measures linked to the ceasefire, along with a continued effort to fight terrorism. Astana must bring forth Geneva and vice versa. That is why the United Nations will be in Tehran and Astana, and provide whatever technical support it can to what we consider a very important step.

It has been said so many times. We have said it together so many times, but I will say it again: there can only be a political solution to that bloody conflict. There is no military solution despite what some try or believe. That is what I hear from Syrians from all walks of life. That is what we have been told from those who participated in the United Nations Civil Society Support Room and by the Women's Advisory Board. That is the voice of the Syrians. That is what members of the Council have long agreed upon. Let us therefore view this moment of Crisis — and it is a moment of Crisis — as a watershed and an opportunity, perhaps, for a new level of seriousness in the search for a political solution.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing, and we greatly appreciate his commitment to and leadership on this issue.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and his unrelenting efforts to secure a political solution to the conflict in Syria. He has our continued full support.

Despite his efforts and those of the Security Council and the international community, the people of Syria have been denied a political solution for more than six years. They have suffered over six years of ever-increasing and ever-escalating barbarity, failed ceasefires and full storms. For more than six years, the Council has been held to ransom by Russia's shameless support for the Al-Assad regime — support, which the regime is flaunting. Throughout that time, we have met in this Chamber to discuss atrocity after atrocity, while hoping that Al-Assad had finally reached the depth of his cruelty and would finally see the need for dialogue. Yet every time without fail he just plunged to new lows.

Chemical weapons scientists in the United Kingdom have analysed samples obtained from Khan Shaykhun. Those have tested positive for the nerve agent sarin or a sarin-like substance. The United Kingdom therefore shares the United States assessment that it is highly likely that the regime was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April. That sickening use of chemical weapons — weapons that Al-Assad had agreed in 2013 to destroy — is just the latest in a long list of abhorrent attacks. With that attack, he has made clear that he is not committed to a ceasefire or the Astana process, thereby ruining Russia's credibility. As we mourn the victims of the chemical attack on Khan Shaykhun, we must not forget the 13.5 million people who, thanks to Al-Assad, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and a long overdue peace. It is clear today as it has been for some time that there can be no place for Al-Assad in Syria's future.

There is however a way to end the nightmare that the Syrian people continue to suffer. The 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), which we unanimously adopted, chart the way to peace in Syria. We have a Special Representative in Staffan de Mistura who is rightly determined to keep the political process alive and pursue a renewed United Nations-facilitated effort. We have in our position prepared to take a pragmatic approach to discussions, and we have millions upon millions of Syrians inside and outside the country crying out for long overdue peace. Yet we are still here in this Chamber with the regime showing no interest in peace, encouraged by Russia's support in the Council to continue dropping bombs and using chemical weapons.

Russia has repeatedly abused its use of the veto to protect the regime and defend its use of chemical weapons. What has Russia received in return for its use of the veto seven times during six years? Let me tell everyone. Russia's initiative in 2013 to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons has been exposed as a shambles. Russian pride in the Astana process has been turned into humiliation, and Russia's credibility and reputation throughout the world have been poisoned by its toxic association with Al-Assad. It has chosen to side with a murderous barbaric criminal rather than with its international peers. It has chosen the wrong side of history. However, it is not too late for Russia to change course. It is not too late for Russia to fulfil its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council. It is not too late for Russia to use finally its influence over the regime to end the conflict.

Those efforts must begin meaningfully with attempts to end the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs — real efforts to bring about a ceasefire and ensure proper humanitarian access. In doing so, Russia can establish the space needed for a renewed push on the physical process that leads to that political transition to a Government that represents all Syrians. Should it do so and choose that path, we stand ready to work with Russia to preserve Syrian institutions through the political transition. We Stand ready to find ways of cooperating with Russia to counter Da'esh

and other international terrorist threats. We stand ready to engage with Russia as a constructive partner on the Council. While Al-Assad offers Russia only shame and humiliation, we offer Russia something else — the chance once again to work with the international community as a credible member.

Finally, the Syrian people have waited for more than six years. Hundreds of thousands have died. Countless hospitals, schools and homes have been destroyed. Now more than ever, the international community must come together to end that senseless conflict. That is why we stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States and its decision to take military action against the Sharyat airfield from where last week's attacks were launched. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies from the Group of Seven and all those who are committed to deter the future use of chemical weapons and finally bring peace to Syria.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet once again to discuss a crisis that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, displaced millions of families and contributed to establishing a safe haven for tens of thousands of mercenaries and terrorists whose presence is a threat to the region and the world. Despite the fact that Syria's humanitarian and security disaster and the Syrian conflict are among the top priorities of the media, politicians and, for several long years, the Security Council's agenda, and while we have repeated the same condemnations and expressions of compassion countless times, that disaster continues unabated and without mercy. As the years go by, the crisis only deepens and becomes increasingly complex to such an extent that a political situation, which should have been the definitive solution, has now become only a first step to try to contain the disastrous repercussions that the Syrians and the people of other countries in the region continue and will continue to suffer for many years.

I deplore the fact that there have been so many times throughout all these years when we thought that a political solution was within reach, that the outline of a settlement was clear in our minds and in the international documents we produced, that there was a consensus expressed in those documents. Now, once again, we are faced with a another conundrum another breakdown that is evidence of a new international and regional polarization. Instead of managing to bring the various Syrian parties together, the international community has forced them to dig in their heels to defend false hopes of achieving a victory that is impossible to achieve. The march to such an illusory victory will only increase the suffering of the Syrian people.

We have issued many warnings about how serious it is to accept this polarization both within and outside the Security Council. I have said more than once that this regional and international rivalry will lead only to more deaths. Failure to interfere or to support one of the parties in the Syrian conflict does not mean that one is abdicating one's responsibilities. Quite the country, it simply means that there will be no winner in this crisis and that as long as the crisis continues the suffering of our Syrian brothers and sisters will also continue.

We have sought to reach an agreement in the Council and outside it to put an end to a proxy war that threatens the future of everyone. I would like to call once again on the various international actors, particularly the joint chairmanship of the International Syria Support Group, Russia and the United States, to work as quickly as possible to reach a political agreement. I would also like to underscore that cooperation is best way to counter those who are trying to undermine the possibility of reaching a political settlement.

Those who exploit the vacuum created by polarization are trying to undermine all attempts to end the crisis. That is why I would like to call on all the Syrian parties, regardless of their orientation, to act responsibly and engage in serious and objective negotiations in good faith and without preconditions for the future of the country under the auspices of Special Envoy De Mistura. I call on them to set aside their narrow interests and ask them to understand that, if they do not do so, they and the Syrian people will be the losers in this conflict.

Once again, I recall that the interests of the Syrian people and of these various parties will not be served by acting in the interests of the parties' foreign sponsors; that will lead only to more destruction and further deepen the disaster in Syria, a country that has made significant contributions to a Muslim, Arab and international culture. I am not exaggerating when I say that achieving an agreement based on the interests of the Syrian people will force everyone to accept the will of the Syrian people.

Due to the gravity of Syria's experience and the Security Council's inability to agree to open an investigation into the Khan Shaykhun events, I reiterate our call to move forward and investigate these events in

a clear, neutral and independent manner. I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura, for his efforts, and reiterate that Egypt will spare no efforts in supporting his work pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the road map that has been adopted.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): A week ago, the regime perpetrated another chemical-weapons attack. At least 86 people died from asphyxiation near Idlib; hundreds were injured. The symptoms observed, as well as the dramatic number of deaths, are indicative of the use of a neurotoxic agent, probably a mixture based on sarin. The decision of the United States to strike the Al-Shayrat air base was a response to the gravity of the act and the threat. It sent the Syrian regime a message it should have heard long ago — its time of impunity has now passed.

Together with the United States and the United Kingdom, France has proposed a draft resolution which will be put to a vote in the Security Council shortly. Its simple and balanced text condemns the 4 April attack and reaffirms United Nations support for the investigation of the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic into the circumstances of this attack and the nature of the substance used. It is a matter of bringing the Council together around a fundamental objective: the protection of the international non-proliferation regime, which has been flouted in Syria, and the fight against the impunity of the perpetrators of chemical attacks.

Beyond the tragedy of Khan Shaykhun, all of Syria offers a landscape of devastation and desolation today. The cessation of hostilities, as guaranteed by the 30 December agreement and the Astana process, no longer exists. The regime's supporters never acted seriously to respect it. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating day by day. Throughout the country, the regime is tightening its grip around civilian populations by refusing to grant the authorizations needed to carry out the monthly plan of humanitarian convoys. Let us not deceive ourselves. We are seeing here a deliberate policy of obstruction and siege designed to compel opponents to surrender and people to flee, in violation of Security Council resolutions and the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

The Syrian regime's allies are responsible for applying all appropriate pressure to force the regime to finally live up to its obligations. In particular, Russia, as the guarantor of the regime of cessation of hostilities announced last December, needs to turn its commitments into action. The immediate urgency must be to force the Syrian regime to finally respect the cessation of hostilities and finally provide access to the necessary humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

Furthermore, the cessation-of-hostilities system needs to be completely revised. We have to avoid the flaws of the previous versions and put in place a more inclusive, coherent, and robust monitoring mechanism. Since last September, France has called for the establishment of such a mechanism for monitoring the cessation of hostilities. Some deny the evidence, but no matter what happens, we can no longer act as if the 4 April attack had not taken place. We can no longer act as if this track record of desolation and chaos is not primarily the track record of the Bashar Al-Assad regime. The attack on Khan Shaykhun is just a reminder of a sinister reality about which France, since August 2013, has never ceased to alert the members of the Security Council.

We must come to an understanding today about the obvious: a political solution leading to a real transition is now more urgent and necessary than ever. As long as the regime keeps itself in power through terror and destruction, with the complicity of its supporters, there will never be peace and reconstruction in Syria. The millions of refugees forced onto roads of exile will have no hope of returning to their homes nor will they ever overcome a terrorist threat that will continue to feed on the violence and desolation that gave rise to it and made it prosper in the first place. The absolute urgency, the priority of the priorities, is therefore the resumption of the negotiations to craft — together — a political solution.

It is therefore incumbent on all of us to exert the necessary pressure on the leading stakeholders so that they can engage in good faith negotiations without delay. In that connection, France renews its fullest support and confidence in Special Envoy De Mistura, whose commitment is exemplary. We commend his announcement of resolutionesumed negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations in mid-May. France supports the start of the next cycle of negotiations on an accelerated timeline with a view to reaching a speedy agreement on a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). We must all rise above our political choices, national interests and moral considerations,

and shoulder our responsibilities in order to support this solution. That is an imperative that concerns our collective security. It is at the heart of our mandate and a responsibility shared by all members of the Security Council.

In conclusion, recent developments have realigned the situation and highlighted the urgency of the need for a political transition in Syria. We hope that the recent developments have created the conditions for re-engagement of the leading stakeholders with a view to a political solution. Given the tragedy in Syria, which continues to spiral downwards into the deepest of abysses, we are more bound to our duty than ever. We are also faced with the opportunity of injecting new, decisive life into a political solution. Let us make sure that we seize the opportunity. This is a time of truth. Let us make sure that we shoulder our responsibilities at this historical moment.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Envoy for Syria De Mistura and his whole team for their tireless work and determination to move forward in spite of all the difficulties faced. We are also very happy to hear that he will continue moving forward in the face of such difficulties. We fully trust Mr. De Mistura and the efforts of Secretary-General Guterres to continue the search for a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

Neither Mr. De Mistura nor Secretary-General Guterres is the main actor in this tragedy. The primary responsibility in this situation falls on Syrians — the Government, the opposition, civil society and religious leaders. It is up to them to assume responsibility for determining their own futures. There is only one way to do that — sitting down and engaging in discussions. Mr. De Mistura has been working specifically on that task, but he is not a person who can make decisions on behalf of the Syrian people. They have to make those decisions themselves.

Another subsidiary responsibility falls on third-party States. They ought to stop interfering in the Syrian conflict in order to advance their own interests. Another responsibility that is no less important falls on the Security Council. The Security Council must exert pressure and seek to persuade the parties to continue negotiating. We should take advantage of the current momentum, which started in December 2016 with the most recent cessation of hostilities and continued with the Astana process and the ceasefire mechanism.

The events of last week strengthen our conviction that there is no possibility of a military solution to the conflict. Only through a political process mediated by the United Nations and agreed to by the Syrians can we find a solution. We would like to reiterate our strongest condemnation of the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria. That applies to last week's attack and all others. An impartial, independent investigation is required to identify who is responsible for this crime and to hold them accountable. We reiterate our appeal to stay calm and refrain from any unilateral action that might lead to an escalation of tensions. The Syrian conflict should be dealt with in a multilateral framework.

We are aware that the absence of a negotiated settlement has only one victim: the Syrian people — those in the street, men, women, children and the elderly. Our collective responsibility is to them.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Steffan de Mistura, for his tireless efforts in the service of pursuing peace in Syria.

I should also like to acknowledge the spirit of responsibility shown by the Syrian actors during the fifth round of discussions, held in Geneva from 23 to 31 March.

The fact that such discussions have been held as planned, without interruption or abandonment, reflects the commitment and determination of participants to recognize the complexity of such substantive agenda items, such as a political transition, territorial integrity, the fight against terrorism and measures to restore confidence, as well as governance, security and constitutional reform.

The Senegalese delegation expresses the hope that this spirit of sacrifice and persistence, which is really necessary, must continue to impel all parties so that a definitive solution can be reached to the crisis Syrian

conflict, which has lasted too long. We reiterate our hope that the cessation of hostilities throughout the Syrian territory will be sustained and consolidated, notably in the framework of the Trilateral Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism in Astana. We welcome the efforts of the Mechanism's princapl actors: the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran. It is important that this truce translate into a continued improvement of the humanitarian situation on the ground. My delegation believes that the Astana process should reinforce the political process.

My delegation welcomes the conference on Syria, convened in Brussels on 4 and 5 April at the intiative of the European Union and in collaboration with the United Nations, which registered pledges of $6 billion for 2017 to help tackle the daunting challenges facing Syria, where in six years of conflict the level of development has declined by four decades.

We have said on many occasions that the crisis currently faced by Syria is a multidimensional one; it has political, humanitarian and security aspects, and touches on the issue of non-proliferation. With respect to the security aspect, the fight against terrorism — in particular against Da'esh and the former Al-Nusrah Front — is an absolute priority for us. That is why we reiterate the need to implement a comprehensive strategy that respects international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

With respect to non-proliferation, I unreservedly condemn — as I did last week — the recent use of chemicals as weapons in Syria. In the same vein, Senegal once again encourages the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, through its Fact-finding Mission, to gather and study, with all the required professionalism, data from all available sources so as to attribute responsibility for the chemical weapons attack that we saw in Khan Shaykhun. We are hopeful that our Council will find itself in the midst of this essential question of accountability, following this vile act, which affected many civilians — including children.

My delegation, as it was compelled to do here five days ago (see S/PV.7915), cannot stress enough the imperative of a peaceful settlement of the dispute in order to face the challenges that have been repeatedly referred to, including chemicals weapons, the proliferation of terrorist groups and, even more serious, an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Senegal is convinced that only a negotiated political solution, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), will enable us to reach a lasting solution to this conflict. We therefore place great hope in the meeting between the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. Tillerson, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Lavrov.

Senegal reiterates its calls on the Security Council, the most influential countries, and in particular the International Syria Support Group and its co-presidents, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, to continue to provide the necessary support to the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Senegal's fullest support for Mr. De Mistura's tireless efforts, especially since he has just confirmed his intention to convene the next round of talks in May.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, for his extensive briefing, and commend his efforts to keep the political process moving forward. The first round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva demonstrated the willingness of all sides to talk seriously with both the Government and opposition groups, undertaking discussions without a major pause or suspension. Mr. De Mistura described for us today that there has been discussion on key substantive issues while pointing out the need to move beyond the preparatory stages.

Regrettably, the relatively positive news from Geneva is outweighed by grim news on the ground. The alleged use of chemical weapons last week is an affront to humanity and a blatant violation of Security Council resolutions. The Council must reaffirm its determination to urgently address this alleged use of chemical weapons. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the humanitarian situation as a whole. Even with a monthly meeting on the humanitarian situation, it is important that we emphasize it here in the context of the political process as well. We were shocked by the use of chemical weapons; but we have also been shocked for many months by the enormous number of besieged people, now at 644,000 according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Japan's position is clear. We will continue our assistance to all Syrian people in need. This means not simply contributing funds, but taking the responsibility to ensure that aid reaches the people who need it. For

this reason, our attention turns again to the repeated warnings of the United Nations that bureaucratic impediments are the main obstacles to humanitarian access. We have repeatedly urged the Syrian Government, which bears primary responsibility for this obstructed access, to simplify procedures. Japan is deeply disappointed that even on occasions when the Syrian Government has responded, we have not seen any significant change. We will continue to engage closely with other relevant parties to improve access, but we cannot fully succeed without the cooperation of the Syrian Government.

Last year, Mr. De Mistura often used the metaphor of a three-legged stool for Syria. The first leg, the political process, seems more steady after the recent Geneva talks, and we strongly support United Nations efforts there. The second leg, the ceasefire, is starting to wobble with news about fighting. Japan supports efforts by the three guarantors of the Astana process, the only functioning ceasefire mechanism at the present time. We are also encouraged that Mr. De Mistura is extending support to Astana. The third leg, humanitarian access, seems to be very unstable. We need to see major improvements to send a clear message to the Syrian people that they have not been abandoned.

The facts are clear. The International Syria Support Group is working despite some confrontations. United Nations mediation is making some progress. Humanitarian bodies are doing their utmost under difficult circumstances. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Joint Investigative Mechanism are ready to implement their mandates. But what about the Security Council? We must prove that this institution is also serious about finding a solution to this crisis. Proof is long overdue.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of today's open meeting and thanks the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura, for his briefing.

The Syrian conflict has been going on for six years now, resulting in considerable civilian casualties and destruction of the State. China is deeply sympathetic to the suffering endured by the Syrian people and strongly appeals to all Syrian parties to proceed with the future of the country and the welfare of its people in mind, and to find an appropriate solution to the conflict as soon as possible through dialogue and consultation. Recently, the relevant parties made joint diplomatic efforts, launched the Astana talks on Syria, maintained the overall momentum of the Syrian ceasefire and created the conditions to resume the Geneva talks. China hopes that the Astana talks continue to play an important role in maintaining the ceasefire and advancing the Geneva talks to achieve progress.

A political solution is the only way out of the Syrian impasse. Military means will not solve the problem. In the last round of Geneva talks, all Syrian parties negotiated political governance; constitutional issues, elections, counter-terrorism, security and confidence-building measures. That gave expression to their attitude towards ownership and participation and enabled encouraging progress in the political process in Syria.

In the current situation, all relevant parties should continue diplomatic efforts, prevent the deterioration of the situation in Syria, continue to support the United Nations as the main channel for good offices and support the work of Special Envoy Mr. De Mistura. The Security Council should prioritize the interests of Syria and its people and play its constructive role in advancing the Syrian political process. China appeals to all Syrian parties to continue to maintain the ceasefire, follow the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led principle to gradually develop a comprehensive and durable solution through dialogue and negotiation that is acceptable to all.

The fight against terrorism is an important and pressing issue in the solution to the Syrian issue. The counter-terrorism situation in some parts of Syria has taken on new complexities in recent times. The international community should be highly vigilant about related developments, strengthen coordination and cooperation, unify standards and combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council. China welcomes the Brussels international conference on Syria that was convened recently. China would like to work with the international community and continue to play a positive and constructive role in advancing the political solution to the Syrian issue and in easing the humanitarian situation in the country so as to advance a comprehensive, just and appropriate solution to the Syrian issue as soon as possible.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I deeply thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his efforts. We stand fully behind him, the Secretary-General and the political solution, for which he tirelessly strives and which can be the only way forward.

When we spoke in the Chamber last week (see S/PV.7919), on several occasions we expressed our outrage over the atrocity in Khan Shaykhun, near Idlib. But let us not forget that, every day, the Syrian people continue to suffer the Syrian people continue to suffer the brutality of war in all its forms. Despite the horrifying images and their gruesome description in the world media, heroic efforts by humanitarian workers and endless discussions in the Security Council over the years, the — now routine — brutality has continued unabated. It is high time to end the war.

I believe that we have reached a critical moment. In order to move forward, Sweden calls upon the Council and the wider membership present in this room to redouble efforts on three or four fronts. First, we must reinvigorate the political process; secondly, revitalize the ceasefire, and, thirdly, grant full humanitarian access. I would like to add a fourth point and that is that the Council must fully shoulder its responsibilities.

First, we all know that a political solution is the only way to end the Syrian tragedy, which has now lasted over six years. The shared objective remains a negotiated transitional political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore welcome the conclusion of the fifth round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. The next round of talks should resume as soon as circumstances allow in mid-May. We offer our wholehearted support to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy and his leadership, including his efforts to ensure the full and effective participation of women and civil society in the political process. While we welcome the progress from the talks and that both parties have engaged on all 3+1 baskets, we still feel that they need to do more. In the next round, the Syrian Government's delegation needs to seriousiy, meaningfully and concretely engage on all baskets. The opposition delegation has engaged constructively and maturely, but needs to continue efforts to maintain unity.

Secondly, over the past couple of weeks we have witnessed an intensification of fighting. The ceasefire developed through the Astana process is increasingly threatened. The United Nations-led political process will be seriously at risk without an effective nationwide ceasefire. We therefore urge the guarantors of the ceasefire agreement to live up to their commitments from Astana and to step up their efforts, including towards a more effective monitoring mechanism. We call upon all actors present here today with influence over the parties to help put an end to violations and reduce violence.

Thirdly, we all urgently need to do more to increase humanitarian access. Convoy deliveries during the last week of March shows that access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas is possible when there is a will. We call on the Syrian authorities here today to simplify the approval process, as requested by the United Nations We urgently need a systematic shift to sustained and unhindered humanitarian access. United Nations aid convoys are ready to assist 300,000 people every week who are now suffering in horrendous conditions in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. They must be given the administrative approval to do so.

With regard to the repugnant attack in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, we regret that the Council has so far not been able to agree on a strong resolution. There must be a rapid, full and impartial investigation to confirm the use of chemical weapons and those responsible for that horrendous attack must be held to account. We will continue to pursue efforts to that end.

Unspeakable atrocities and crimes against humanity have been committed during the conflict. While long overdue, we must now do our utmost to end the war in Syria. We all agree on the need for a sustainable political solution. Let us therefore engage seriously to make it happen. This is a shared responsibility, particularly and not least for the Security Council.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation expresses appreciation to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his update and commend him on his determined spirit, commitment and leadership. We also welcome our colleague, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Mr. Bashar Ja'afari.

My delegation would like to make the following observations and recommendations. With regard to the chemical weapons situation, the developments of the past week have a direct bearing on the political track. We therefore call on all sides to work towards a compromise so that the political process can move forward. We welcome and support the multifaceted diplomacy being conducted by Mr. De Mistura. We note the efforts made by the United Nations and Mr. De Mistura to settle the Syrian conflict and especially to encourage the participation of almost all major Syrian opposition groups in the fifth round of the Geneva talks. That direction alone will lead to a peaceful solution and end the conflict in Syria. We are optimistic that

at the fifth round of talks in Geneva, held from 23 to 31 March, this time the negotiators were able to move from discussing formal and procedural issues to the substantive and political aspects of future peace talks. We believe that relieving the political situation will enhance our political objectives.

The crisis in Syria is still unfolding and has an impact on the entire region. Kazakhstan therefore believes that the regional approach, involving neighbouring countries should be considered to prevent further deterioration. In that regard, my country calls on all countries in the Middle East and the Gulf region to join the guarantor countries in doing everything possible to ensure that the ceasefire regime is respected and observed by all parties and to support the guarantors.

The Astana process is important for achieving confidence-building measures and we call on all parties to work together to achieve a political settlement. Kazakhstan is deeply concerned about the situation surrounding the use of chemical weapons in Syrian. For the sake of the future of the Syrian people, Astana calls on all members of the Security Council to remain as united as when they adopted resolution 2336 (2016) last December, and demonstrate the same solidarity in moving towards a political settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), adopted in November 2015.

Kazakhstan welcomes the Declaration of the 28th Summit of the League of Arab States, which is aimed at contributing to a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis and acknowledges the enormous efforts of the League. We are grateful to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and His Majesty King Abdullah II in particular, for hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees, and we call on the international community to support Jordan and the other countries that have accepted Syrian refugees.

Kazakhstan urges all sides to ensure as soon as possible that the United Nations and its implementing partners have unrestricted access, without preconditions, to Syria's besieged areas. It is essential that humanitarian assistance be able to reach people promptly if they are to receive medical care and whatever they need to survive.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing on the outcome of the latest round of talks in Geneva, and to take this opportunity to once again express our full support for his tireless and dedicated diplomatic efforts to help bring an end to the Syrian crisis. We appreciate his wisdom and leadership in facilitating the intra-Syrian talks, and we take note of the limited but incremental progress that has been made in the latest rounds, which have enabled the parties to once again sit in the same room and start engaging substantively on the four basket issues involved in a possible settlement of the Syrian crisis.

It is clear that we are meeting today against a backdrop of the reports of the use of chemical weapons on 4 April, which has shocked and appalled all of us here and indeed the whole world. We hope that the alleged incident will not have a serious impact on the political track. The issue now is how, while doing what we must to assure accountability, we can return to honest pursuit of the noble goal of making progress towards a peaceful settlement and thereby ending the suffering of the Syrian people, who have endured so much for the past seven years. We believe that the Foreign Ministers of the Group of Seven (G-7) struck the right note on 11 April in their joint communiqué from Lucca, Italy, when they said that

> "[W]e believe that there is an opportunity to bring this tragic crisis to an end and we hope that all major partners will live up to their international responsibilities and seize this opportunity."

It was even more encouraging to hear them say that if the situation were conducive and others were also willing to meet their obligations, the Group would be prepared to do its part by "pursuing a political settlement and ultimately contributing to the costs of stabilization and reconstruction". As we have said time and again, only a comprehensive political solution can enable that objective to be realized. That is why we must fully support the intra-Syrian talks and the efforts of Special Envoy de Mistura. Once again in that connection, the message of solidarity that came out of the high-level Brussels Conference on support to Syria and the region was indeed timely, and an important ingredient in the creation of a supporting environment for the Geneva talks under the auspices of the United Nations.

Now is the time for the Council to do everything possible to make sure that the peace talks make tangible progress. In that regard, it is absolutely vital that those who have influence on the parties exercise the leverage on them needed to ensure that they seriously and collectively engage in the talks with a clear commitment to ending the conflict. It has become

very clear that without the involvement and cooperation of the major Powers and the countries of the region, nothing will move forward. It is with that in mind that we, like Special Envoy de Mistura, look forward to the outcome of the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the United States and Russia in Moscow today.

We have of course been following the developments on the ground and are deeply disturbed by the continued fighting across many parts of Syria. The military approach should not be allowed to have the upper hand. We believe that the role of the guarantors is critical to ending the violations of the ceasefire and consolidating the Astana process. We very much hope that the next Astana talks, which are expected to take place next month, will be instrumental in that regard. Without full implementation of the ceasefire the prospects for any progress in the intra-Syrian talks will be doomed.

Lastly, what we have understood in the course of the past three months or so on the Council is that the views on a number of important issues concerning the crisis in Syria do converge. Everybody agrees that there is no alternative to a political solution. Everybody also agrees that it is essential to fight terrorism and violent extremism in Syria. We all agree on the importance of ensuring safe and unhindered humanitarian access. Furthermore, everybody agrees that the use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable and that any party, State or non-State, found guilty of such crimes must be held accountable. We should therefore really capitalize on what unites us in order to ensure progress on finding a lasting political settlement of the Syrian crisis and realizing the hope expressed in Lucca by the G-7 Foreign Ministers. We know that this is easier said than done, but if the necessary political will is there, we do not believe that it is too difficult to overcome the current paralysis and achieve a breakthrough.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. Russia has been following the March round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva very closely and encouraging all the participants to work constructively to arrive at mutually acceptable decisions and compromises regarding a peaceful settlement. In that context, we have been in active contact with the Syrian authorities and with a broad cross-section of the opposition.

We support Mr. De Mistura's efforts and believe that he will enhance them. The fact that there have been developments in the Geneva process, and that the sides have launched parallel conversations on all four of the agreed-on discussion baskets on the agenda and have begun studying the conceptual proposals of Mr. De Mistura's mediation can be considered an achievement. We expect the Geneva process to continue steadily. There should be no prolonged pauses. We already went through that negative experience in 2016. I would like to say to Mr. De Mistura that rather than give up, he should continue his painstaking work with the Syrian delegations, actively encouraging them to conduct dialogue and seek common denominators.

However, the statement by Mr. Rycroft of the United Kingdom showed that he is thinking only about how to make Mr. De Mistura's task more difficult, stop the political process developing and bring confrontation and hostility to the Security Council. But the fact of the matter — and many in the United Nations are already aware of it — is that he is afraid. He has been losing sleep over the possibility that we could be working together with the United States. He is afraid of that. He is doing everything he can to undermine that cooperation. That is why he should look at me. He should not look away. Why is he looking away? This is precisely why he said nothing today about the political process. He did not listen to Mr. De Mistura's briefing, and that was on purpose. He makes insulting demands of the guarantors of the Astana process, but what have he and his allies done to advance the ceasefire? In London and Paris they are receiving opposition groups — illegal armed groups. They were suddenly afraid that things were moving towards peace and a political settlement. They serve the interests of armed groups, many of which have been murdering Christians and other minorities in the Middle East. They are committing acts of terror in churches on Palm Sunday. That is who they care about. They jabe completely lost his way with their anti-regime notions. What do they think they are doing?

So it turns out that for them, regime change is more important than the positions of the majority of the States Members of the United Nations. Mr. Rycroft was not speaking about the item on our agenda today. He has insulted Syria, Iran, Turkey and other States. I would ask you, Madam President, to ensure that the rules of procedure for this meeting are respected, because that is your job when some members are irresponsibly resorting to insulting slang in the Security Council. He should not dare to insult Russia again.

We are nevertheless very grateful to Mr. De Mistura for his work. In the run-up to the next round, further efforts will be required to ensure that the intra-Syrian dialogue is genuinely broadly representative. Every patriotic Syrian party should be able to take part in the negotiations on an equal footing in order to discuss how to preserve Syria as a unified, secular State in which all historical communities can live in peace, as has always been the case, and take part in rebuilding the country. The opposition should have an inclusive and consolidated delegation whose members have a common position that takes account of the views of the key factions. There is no room for arrogance here. We should be thinking not about pride and arrogance but about the future of Syria. That is the substance of Mr. Rycroft's concept document. He should think about the future of his own State, not interfere in these people's affairs. Let them conduct their dialogue calmly. Mr. Rycroft should not interfere with Mr. De Mistura. Look at those mentors!

In seeking a formula for a political solution — and I know that this is Mr. De Mistura's position — we cannot allow any interruption in the work of State institutions, especially the security institutions, which bear the main burden in combating the terrorist threat. If we look at the other countries of the Middle East, Africa and other regions, it is clear that we cannot create State institutions even on paper — and Mr. Rycroft wants to destroy the ones that remain in Syria, one of the most important countries in the region.

We insist on discussions being held without any preconditions. We know that that is his position. Against the backdrop of the political efforts, it is obviously unacceptable for the opponents of the Government in Damascus to try to gain military advantages. We should recall that before the March round of negotiations began, the opposition tried to advance on various fronts, including in the vicinity of Syria's capital. We hope that the relevant capitals will cool the hotheads and that such reckless acts will not be repeated.

This is Mr. Rycroft's responsibility when he professes to support the Astana process. He says one thing in the Security Council but believes another, and then in fact does a third thing. I would like to ask him to do his part of the work. Here are London and Paris working with opposition groups. He and his allies should summon them and tell them to support the Astana process. They should tell them that they should not even think of firing on the Russian Embassy in Damascus. But he will not even agree to put out an ordinary announcement condemning the attack on the Russian Embassy in Damascus, his diplomatic colleagues.

In a situation in which tensions have mounted owing to the missile strike by the United States, the importance of political efforts has only increased. Clearly, provocations such as the incident in Khan Shaykhun will only strengthen the positions of those who favour a military solution. We need to determine the facts and conduct a comprehensive investigation. I was surprised, indeed amazed, to hear that French experts have already reached the conclusion that Damascus is responsible. No one has visited the scene of the crime yet. How do they know?

The fate of the country should be determined by the Syrians themselves, not by someone else. That is final. We, together with the other guarantors, Turkey and Iran — and here I want to also warmly thank the the President of Kazakhstan for his leadership — are ready to continue working on the Astana platform. Russia has been responsible in addressing its obligations regarding the strengthening of the ceasefire. But Mr. Rycroft and his allies should also do their part in working with the opposition groups. Astana cannot serve as a panacea in a situation in which others are working to undermine it.

Significant progress has been achieved in terms of local truces, which have made it possible to ease tensions and normalize people's lives from a humanitarian point of view. Many have spoken today about access to besieged areas, and that is an issue that should be resolved. But let us be fair. Why is food not supplied to areas that are controlled by the Government? What, are they a different kind of people? Let us be honest. We know the situation. Support is needed from capitals that at the moment are providing only empty criticism. The Astana process has a unique and special value. It is aimed at practical weays of ending the violence and, most important, it represents a form of direct support to the Geneva process that Mr. De Mistura is leading. We know that he and the overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations greatly value the Astana process.

We would also like to draw the attention of the international community and the United Nations to the significant contamination of Syrian territory by mines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices. We regularly inform the Council about the significant activities carried out by Russian experts to

deal with this problem. We call for the formation of an international coalition to demine Syria. Blackmail to the effect that demining will begin once there is regime change is unacceptable and hypocritical.

The specialized United Nations service could play an important role in that regard. Of course, the humanitarian component is very important in that respect. People need to feel safe, when they return to their homes and economic activity, that their children will not be blown up and civilians will not suffer. At the same time, mines must be cleared from the World Heritage site in Palmyra. Those are the kinds of issues we must work on. We need to discuss problems related to migration — not regime change but mine clearance and conflict resolution. People will return to their homes by themselves; they do not need to be forced to do anything. These are the kinds of issues that need to be tackled. We need to work together on improving the social conditions in which people live.

Instead, international and regional forums are convened where virtual billions are pledged without even the representatives of Syria being present. How is that related to statements made here in the Security Council that the fate of the Syrian people is in their own hands? Many of us are giving serious thought to the post-conflict future of Syria and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. That would be the most meaningful and important response to the terrorists' acivities.

But to exclude Damascus and the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic from this process is unprofessional, unacceptable, unethical and arrogant. A political settlement is the only way to restore peace in Syria and to ease the tensions in the Middle East through Syria and a political improvement in that country. That is the path towards normalizing the situation in many countries of the Middle East. We have an opportunity to make Syria a model of cooperation towards a settlement, but destructive geopolitical projects will not contribute to that. We will not give them a free pass in the Security Council.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): At the outset, allow me to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and especially for his leadership in advancing the political process in very challenging circumstances.

After six years, violence and destruction continue to plague Syrian and cause tremendous suffering for the Syrian people. With time, attacks against civilians have become even more barbaricand despicable, if that were possible, as the horrific use of chemical weapons in the air strike in Khan Shaykhun showed last week. Given the current grave circumstances, a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and can relaunch the faltering cessation of hostilities, reconsolidate the political process and possibly bring this tragic crisis to an end is needed more than ever. We all have a collective responsibility in that.

In that regard, let me recall the timely discussions that took place yesterday at the ministerial meeting of the Group of Seven (G-7), and then in the G-7 enlarged to some key regional stakeholders, as Ambassador Alemy rightly reminded us. On both occasions, convened by Minister Alfano, all countries conveyed a strong message of support to the political process, and notably to the Geneva intra-Syrian negotiations and the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

We all need, therefore, to commit to a diplomatic search, not a military search, to support the Geneva talks and advance the political process by swiftly implementing all steps agreed by the Council in resolution to 2254 (2015). As the negotiationss move to the substance of the issues, no rapid major breakthrough can be expected, but we commend the Special Envoy for having kept the parties engaged in the process and committed to discussing the way forward, in accordance with the defined agenda and in line with resolution to 2254 (2015).

The parties should now redouble their efforts to address in detail the substantive matters on the agenda. We have consistently encouraged the High Negotiations Committee to adopt a realistic and flexible attitude during the negotiations. Countries with influence on Damascus should now press the regime to engage seriously in negotiations and avoid dilatory tactics.

The Astana process made an important contribution to the relaunch of the cessation of hostilities. However, the situation on the ground has been deteriorating again, putting a considerable strain on the truce. An effective cessation of hostilities must be pursued as a matter of priority. The Syrian regime has not renounced its intention to achieve military territorial gains, and the ceasefire continues to be violated by all parties. Humanitarian access is denied in besieged areas, notably by the regime. All parties must allow rapid, safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need throughout Syria.

It is paramount that the core guarantors of the Astana process, and more generally the key international stakeholders, exert all their influence in that respect. Progress in Astana on the implementation of the ceasefire, humanitarian access and confidence-building measures feeds, of course, into the Geneva process by creating an environment conducive to the political talks.

Finally, let me underline that progress on the political track is also key to ensuring better and more effective international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and the effort to end violent radicalization, extremism and terrorism needs to include a serious and genuine effort towards a peaceful transition and reconciliation process. Only a real political transition, we think, will eradicate terrorism from Syria.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Madam President, I thank you for convening this meeting in the open Chamber.

Let me also thank Special Representative De Mistura for his dedicated efforts and diligent approach as the deep waters of the complex Syria political situation become ever harder to navigate.

Today we are clearly at the low point with regard to the Syrian political situation. Following the latest two rounds of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, I believe that it is fair to say that, unfortunately, we have not seen the much-desired progress on either of the 3+1 baskets. Be it with respect to political transition, constitution, elections or counterterrorism, there is not much to be optimistic about. The only achievement so far is that we have managed to get two delegations to Geneva. Why? The answer is obvious; it is the lack of political will, particularly from the Syrian regime, to negotiate in full faith on the core issues. The stalled political process may set in motion a vast number of alternative scenarios that nobody would like.

It is only natural that every actor in Syria has a wish-list, yet Damascus and its allies need to understand that a my-way-or-no-way kind of approach — the "ultimate victory" attitude — will lead nowhere, prolong the crisis and feed the extremists. Damascus needs to understand one more thing — the international community has made it crystal-clear that the political solution is the only way out of the Syrian quagmire, and that the recipe for this solution has long been out there. Any progress on the political track will be unsustainable without clear adherence to the letter and spirit of the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), a transparent and strictly scheduled political transition, and the guidance of the United Nations.

We believe that Russia has all the means at its disposal to influence Damascus and its allied militias to reconsider their militaristic approach, begin supporting political process and national reconciliation, and finally enter negotiations. For some reason, that influence has never been never employed to good ends. I remain convinced that, unless serious pressure is applied on Damascus and an accountability mechanism is established in Syria, we will not see any progress on the political track. The chemical weapons attack on 4 April is a grim reminder of that.

We are discouraged by the absence of real results from the Astana process and the ceasefire negotiated within its framework. One lesson to be learned from that bitter experience is that the proliferation of negotiating platforms does not necessarily bear fruit. It was a good try, but it did not work. It is now time to concentrate all efforts on the United Nations-led Geneva process and ensure that it works. We therefore look forward to the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, hopefully, next month. It will already be high time for Damascus and its allies to demonstrate a change in mindset, intentions and attitude.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting.

First, let me begin by saying that in the current situation, I believe that there is full agreement among all members of the Security Council that we must support the efforts being made Mr. De Mistura and his team with regard to such a sensitive issue and the work of the Secretary-General. Given that grim scenario, there may be a glimmer of hope at the end of this long, dark tunnel of war that is ravaging the brotherly country of Syria.

Three meetings took place during the Astana process, and there was unanimous agreement in the Security Council pertaining to decisions that were reflected in the longest-lasting ceasefire during the conflict as a result of the efforts of Russia, Turkey, Iran and Kazakhstan. The peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations through the Special Envoy have already enjoyed their fifth round of talks in Geneva on the four baskets, which Mr. De Mistura mentioned, including governance issues, constitutional process issues, election issues and counter-terrorism, among others. Bolivia expresses its most fervent support

for the work of Mr. De Mistura and the Geneva and Kazakhstan process, which are both complementary.

Another area of convergence — and I hope that this is not just talk — is that we have all said that the only option for resolving the conflict is through a political process. We therefore call for the joint work of the parties involved to ensure that the peace process be taken forward for and by the Syrian people based on candid, inclusive and constructive dialogue. We urge the parties involved in the crisis to abandon once and for all any provocative action, and ensure, as the Secretary-General said, that they ensure that there is no further escalatory intentions in the crisis. Peace talks must continue without delays and must proceed in a manner that strengthens and consolidates the mandates of resolution 2254 (2015). That is a clear example that it is possible for us to take coordinated and unanimous action together.

As we have said, we believe that any type of unilateral action will only undermine a dialogue process and block the way to peacebuilding in Syria at the expense of millions of lives in that country. We acknowledge the efforts made by the Government and the people of Syria in combating terrorism. We vigorously condemn all terrorist acts as criminal and unjustifiable, whatever their motivation, wherever and whenever they take place, and by whomever they are committed. We reiterate the need to ensure that all States combat terrorism in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant obligations in accordance with international law.

Once again, Bolivia calls on the Council to ensure that we defend mulitilateralism in line with the Charter. We must say that the opposite of multilateralism is unilateralism. Unilateral actions only undermine the dialogue process being taken forward by Mr. De Mistura and the Secretary-General. By the same token, it also prejudices the outcome. We call for an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation of the atrocious chemical weapons attack. Of course, we do not understand the logic behind the chronology of the condemnation following the attack, before an investigation. I do not really understand the rational behind that attitude unless the intention is to bring some sort of pressure to bear on the Moscow talks taking place between Russia and the United States.

I fail to understand the intentions behind introducing a draft resolution that, as we already know, will be vetoed. We have spoken about resolution 2254 (2015), which was unanimously adopted by the Council, and we believe that the international community is calling on the 15 members of the Security Council to remain unified and work together towards achieving peace. Who benefits from war? Who benefits from the fact that the Security Council is not working as one voice? The answer is, first and foremost, the terrorists. My understanding is that we have a common enemy with a name: Da'esh, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram. Those are our common enemies, and the international community is demanding that the Security Council act jointly, in unison and unanimously to combat that threat to international peace and security.

Who else benefits from the failure of the peace processes to advance and the Security Council's failure to work as one? The answer is the industrial military complex and those who benefit economically from war. They are the ones receiving the best economic guarantees that result from the Syrian and other wars. I read an editorial in the *New York Times* by Charles Blow, who wrote that war is also a very lucrative business from which many people enjoy the benefits.

We hope that the Security Council will assume its responsibility not only under the Charter of the United Nations, but also in accordance with the tenets of humanity, and work as one to free humankind from the nightmare of war and avoid an impasse from which, as we know from the lessons of history, it is very difficult to exit.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Mr. De Mistura for his helpful and informative briefing today. We appreciate his commitment in this process going forward.

Last week, Bashar Al-Assad yet again terrorized his own people with one of the world's most horrific weapons. Al-Assad's murderous attack shook everyone of us to our core. It once again showed the world that Al-Assad is not a partner for peace. It showed what happens when Al-Assad's allies — Russia, Iran and Hizbullah — decide to lend their support to a barbaric regime instead of joining the world to stop it.

When Al-Assad's planes dropped chemical weapons, his regime violated a resolution of this very Council (resolution 2118 (2013)) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Al-Assad mocked every assurance the

Russians gave us that there were no chemical weapons in Syria. The United States was compelled to act. We will not allow the use of chemical weapons to go unanswered. We are not going to look the other way. We are watching the regime's actions carefully.

My colleagues from Russia are isolating themselves from the international community every time one of Al-Assad's planes drops another barrel bomb on civilians and every time Al-Assad tries to starve another community to death. People — not just in the West but across the Middle East and the world — are speaking out against Al-Assad's brutality. It is long past time for Russia to stop covering for Al-Assad. It is long past time for Russia to push seriously for peace and not continue to be part of the problem.

The road to peace is long. We will not get a political solution overnight, but we can start by working together to actually de-escalate the conflict. For Russia, getting serious about peace starts by fulfilling its commitment to getting chemical weapons out of Syria. We urge Russia to use its influence to make Al-Assad actually live up to his international obligations. That means giving investigators who are already mandated through existing mechanisms full access to the bases from which the regime launched its chemical weapons attacks and access to anyone who might have been involved.

Russia talks about its commitment to a political solution. It must commit to the Geneva talks. Now is the time Russia needs to show the world whether it genuinely wants to be a part of the political process. We need to see a real ceasefire on the ground. We need to see a credible political process through which Syrians can chart their future. We need to see Russia choose to side with the civilized world over an Al-Assad Government that brutally terrorizes its own people. The United States is ready to do our part. Russia, too, needs to do its part.

Getting serious about peace also means that we have to be honest about Iran's role in Syria. Iran is Al-Assad's chief accomplice in the regime's horrific acts. Standing next to Al-Assad's generals are Iranian advisers whispering in their ears or giving orders. Standing next to Al-Assad's soldiers are Hizbullah militias, with weapons courtesy of Iran and the power to overrule the Syrian military. Iran is dumping fuel on the flames of this war in Syria so it can expand its own reach.

The Council needs to bring attention to Iran's barbaric acts in Syria. We need to collectively demand that Iran stop. We need to make sure that Iran cannot use Syria as a base to keep terrorizing the Syrian people and the entire region.

The Council also needs to be serious about peace in Syria. Month after month, we all repeat the same points in this Chamber. We all say there is no military solution to this conflict, but look at what actually happens on the ground. The Council's relevance depends on taking action to condemn those responsible for violence and to hold them accountable for defying the Council's demands. The Council should not just say that it is in favour of a political solution, but also actively pressure the parties to prove it. That means adopting resolutions that say what we mean — resolutions that we are all willing to uphold.

So what happens next in Syria will depend on what all parties choose to do. For our part, the United States will continue to use influence over any party to push for peace. We will encourage our allies to use their influence on any and all opposition groups, too. We will not support a process that gives cover to Al-Assad while he stalls for time and his forces slaughter the Syrian people, and as we showed last week, we will not stand for the continued use of chemical weapons. There are actions by the Al-Assad regime that we simply will not tolerate.

The United States firmly believes that a political process can work despite the odds. We remain committed to the Geneva process. We are ready to throw our weight and resources behind diplomacy. We are ready to help bring this conflict to an end. But our commitment is not enough. The United States is looking for partners that are serious about using their influence over the Al-Assad regime and towards defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. Every country needs to do its part. All of us must commit not just in words but also in actions to the same goal — peace in Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, whom we ask to be conscious of time.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, I hope you will be patient enough, in your capacity as President of the Security Council for this month, to hear what I have to say. I

listened carefully to each of our colleagues and have the right and the duty as a founding Member of this international Organization to inform them of the views of my Government.

Some 14 years ago, a few weeks before 19 March 2003, the day of the invasion of Iraq, I was sitting behind the then-Foreign Minister of my country, who occupied the seat where the representative of Italy is now sitting today. I was attending the meeting at which Colin Powell, the former Secretary of State of the United States, spoke about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq (S/PV.4701). I was there.

Everyone remembers what the Chairmen of the investigation and inspection commissions said about so-called weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Ralph Ekeus, Richard Butler, Scott Ritter, Hans Blix and others were among them. They said that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that these allegations were a pretext to justify invading and occupying Iraq.

Evev more heinous, members of the Council undoubtedly remember — or at least some of them do — that in late 2008 the Security Council decided, after the investigation of the alleged existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was closed, to bury the archives of the United Nations Special Commission established pursuant to Security Council resolution 687 (1991) and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, by placing them in vaults, out of reach to anyone except the Secretary-General. The vaults were sealed and can be opened only after 60 years had elapsed. Can you imagine, Madam President, what secrets contained in the archives of those two commissions?

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union seems to have motivated it to seek out a new role in the world — making and adopting irrational and extreme statements and positions in the Council. We recall the criminal role Tony Blair played in encouraging the invasion of Iraq 14 years ago, fabricating the lie of the existence of Iraqi WMDs and pushing the American elephant to smash rich Iraqi lustre pottery with a brutality that the people of Iraq are still paying for to this day.

I deliver my statement today after an absence of more than three months, as I was leading the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic in shuttle rounds of intra-Syrian talks in Astana and Geneva with a view to launching a serious dialogue that would result in a political solution driven by Syrians themselves without any external interference and unify counter-terrorism efforts. A week ago, we thought that we would be coming to today's meeting to inform the Security Council of the progress recently achieved in Astana and Geneva, give the necessary momentum and support to His Excellency Special Envoy De Mistura and to all parties that are working seriously to reach a political settlement of the crisis in my country, Syria, and coordinate our counter-terrorism efforts.

Despite this optimism, the United States Administration insisted on repeating the same bloody, theatrical play that it staged 14 years ago in thd Council against Iraq. It was a play entitled *The Lie of the Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Once again, the United States Administration is taking the war on terrorism imposed on my country, Syria, to unprecedented and dangerous levels by switching from a proxy aggression through armed terrorist groups, who have been under its control for years, to a new, direct aggression through direct military action against Syria.

The United States has been leading terrorism in Syria along with its allies and agents in the region. It has provided all forms of support to terrorist groups to commit the most heinous crimes against civilians and Syrian infrastructure. Those crimes include the practices of the so-called international coalition. Recent incidents have proven that the coalition has only destroyed infrastructure, bombarded civilians and provided air cover to the Al-Nusra Front, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other affiliated terrorist groups, as when it bombarded the Syrian Army position on Tharda Mountain, in Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September 2016.

The direct military support and air cover to armed terrorist groups was not only provided by the so-called international coalition. Israel was the first to win the honour of supporting terrorism. Since terrorist groups, including Al-Nusra Front, started their operations in the area of separation, Israel has provided all forms of support to those groups, including medical relief and care to injured terrorists at the expense of the Qatari regime, as members know. Israel has provided air cover by launching airstrikes against positions held by the Syrian Army every time the Syrian Army has been able to gain ground against these terrorist groups. Even worse, Israel has provided direct support to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant through airstrikes launched

on 17 March against Syrian Army positions in Palmyra in order to support the operations of the Islamic State in that city.

Similar theatrics took place on the morning of Friday, 7 April. At the time, the United States Administration and its allies felt that the terrorist groups that had been armed, trained and financed by these countries had begun to lose ground because of the heavy blows dealt to them by the Syrian Army and its allies. They launched their premeditated and flagrant attack against Shayrat air base with the pretext of the use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun, a village primarily under the control of Al-Nusra Front. It did not stop there. That attack was preceded by political expediency when the United States decided to exploit the international mechanisms of the Security Council to submit provocative draft resolutions that would put the blame on the Syrian Government for the abhorrent use of chemical weapons and distance any suspicion from the real enemy — terrorists and their supporters.

The dangerous attack had been thought through for many months in the back rooms of intelligence agencies in Tel Aviv, Riyadh, Doha, Ankara, Amman, Washington, D.C., London and Paris. Those same capitals have, over the past years, sought to provide their terrorist agents inside Syria, notably Al-Nusra Front, with toxic chemicals for them to use, placing the blame on the Syrian Government. That was the case in Khan al-Assal on 19 March 2013, in eastern Ghouta on 21 August 2013, in Talmenes on 21 April 2014, and in Sarmin and Qamenas on 16 March, 2015.

I will not go into detail on the more than 90 letters addressed to the Council since the beginning of the crisis. The letters detail the possession by armed groups of chemical elements to be used against civilians and plans to put the blame on the Syrian Government with a view to demonizing the Government in the eyes of Council members and of world public opinion, thereby justifying interference in the internal affairs of Syria. Some of the letters have even detailed the smuggling of sarin gas from Libya through Turkey on a civilian airplane by using a criminal Syrian citizen of the name of Haithem Al-Qasar. Two liters of sarin gas were transported from Libya through Turkey to terrorist groups in Syria. We have given the Council the names, dates, incidents and events, as well as the itinerary of the aforementioned trip from Libya to Syria.

I would like to refer the Council to a statement made by the former French Foreign Minister, Mr. Roland Dumas, in June 2013. In that statement, he said that during a visit to London he was told of a conspiracy against Syria, whose goal was to destroy Syria and isolate its Government, given its anti-Israeli position. That was two years before the start of the crisis in Syria. Mr. Roland Dumas was made privy to a plot to destroy Syria two years before the crisis even started.

I would also like to refer the Council to a report in *Daily Mail* from January, 2013. The report, which was withdrawn and deleted from online shortly after it was published, detailed emails between high-ranking officials in a British corporation , Britam Defence. The emails talked of a plot agreed upon by Washington, D.C., whereby Qatar, in cooperation with Turkey, would finance insurgents in Syria to use chemical weapons. At the time, President Obama only had to draw a red line, saying that any use of chemical weapons in Syria would not be tolerated. That red line was used to justify military aggression against Syria. However, he fortunately backtracked at the last minute when his European allies decided to jump ship, given mounting pressure from international public opinion that led them to reject any interference in Syria.

Documents leaked by Wikileaks prove that the White House had given a green light to a chemical attack in eastern Ghouta, in the suburbs of Damascus, in order to put blame on the Syrian Government. It uses the chemical attack as an incentive for international military aggression against Syria.

Today, the new United States administration, of which we were optimistic, claims that counter-terrorism is one of its priorities, and its allies could not find a pretext except to regress to the same red-line deception and fabricate the incident of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun in order to launch an attack against Syria and sabotage the Astana and the Geneva talks, save the armed terrorist groups from their predicament and help other opposition groups shirk their obligations related to the political settlement and counter-terrorism.

Why was that? It was because we had added another element to the talks in Geneva, the basket of counter-terrorism, something that the enemies of the political track in Syria did not like. Otherwise, how could a sane and reasonable person accept the lies, disinformation and accusations against Syria of using chemical weapons that Syria does not even possess? We do not

have chemical weapons, as confirmed by the report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism of June 2014 to the Council, when Ms. Sigrid Kaag said on that date that Syria no longer had any chemical weapons. Even worse, those who destroyed the chemical weapons at the time were ships of the United States in the Mediterranean.

This comes at a time when the Syrian army and its allies are achieving crushing victories against terrorism; national reconciliation is being concluded across Syrian towns and regions; and significant steps have been taken in the Astana talks, emphasizing, as Mr. De Mistura said, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. That means controlling the borders with neighbouring States, particularly Turkey and Jordan, preventing the flow of terrorists, ending the hostilities, separating armed groups from Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL, and unifying counter-terrorism efforts. Those are the results of Astana; if they were implemented, the Syrian crisis could have ended within 24 hours.

As the Geneva talks started to shape a political vision and a road map for a settlement in Syria, as my country is witnessing a diplomatic openness and visits by parliamentary missions, including Western delegations, which have been briefing the global public opinion about what is really happening in Syria and calling for support to the Syrian Government in its war against terrorism. I put this question to every person who still resorts to logic, reason and law law in this Council to explain this blind madness and brutal desire to burn my country and the region to the ground, as well as to move the international community into a new phase of war and conflict, in which there will be no victors but terrorism, the doctrine of extremism, hatred, and the logic of military might and the law of the jungle.

In the face of this falsification and manipulation to justify the military aggression, my country's Government has sent to you, Madam President, and to other members of the Council a letter referring to the call of the Syrian Government on the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague to send a technical mission to Khan Shaykhun and to Shayrat air base to uncover the truth about what happened. This means that we, the Syrian Government, want to know who used the chemical gas in my country. We should all say no to a war is being promoted by warmongers and the enemies of law as a normal option — business as usual as they sit comfortably in safety, enjoying their privileges, revenue and arrogance.

During the latest round of talks in Geneva, my country's Government submitted a number of papers to Special Envoy De Mistura, starting with a paper on general principles for a political solution in Syria with a view to finding a logical and normal common ground to start discussing all issues that are an essential part of the debate pertaining to the four baskets. We have also submitted other papers, including one on counter-terrorism. Over the nine days of talks, we discussed all agreed agenda items. Unfortunately, there was no serious partner actually committed to pursuing counter-terrorism and to finding a political solution, let alone the existence of a multitude of oppositions, and not a Syrian opposition.

My country denounces attempts by the United States Administration, Britain and France to sabotage the efforts of the Special Envoy and to block the Geneva and Astana talks. We have engaged seriously, patiently and responsibly in these talks because our people hold us historically responsible for defending the country and staunching the bloodshed. The American aggression will not prevent the Syrian Government and its allies from pursuing counter-terrorism, actively engaging in the next rounds of Geneva and Astana talk, or discuss ing the agreed agenda and engaging seriously on all issues related to governance, the constitution, elections and counter-terrorism simultaneously. We will also spare no effort to support any genuine endeavour that seeks to reach a political solution that will allow Syrians themselves to decide their own future, whereby only the Syrians themselves determine their future and their options in a manner that would preserve the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

To conclude, I was perplexed by the statement made by my colleague from France, according to which he and the other three States or P3 intended to submit today's draft resolution and to put it to vote in shameful diplomatic haste. Such a provocative step comes before a fair international investigation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Therefore, submitting a draft resolution was a blatant misuse of the Security Council's mechanisms, and it reminds us of similar misuse of by Britain and America against Iraq 14 years ago exactly, on 9 April 2003.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.